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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 YEREVAN 001931

SIPDIS

STATE PASS TO AID/EE/AA

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SUBJECT: IN LETTER TO SECRETARY RICE, PRESIDENT KOCHARIAN
COMPLAINS ABOUT NDI

REF: 04 YEREVAN 830

Classified By: Ambassador John Evans, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (S) SUMMARY: Armenian President Kocharian summoned the Ambassador to complain, as he has done before, about activities of the National Democratic Institute, in particular those of its current director, who is scheduled to depart next week. This time he put his complaint into a letter to Secretary Rice, saying that he did not want or expect any response. We trace the history of this issue, speculate as to the probable purpose and timing of the letter, and suggest a way forward that should protect U.S. programs and the overall U.S. interest here. END SUMMARY

2. (S) The morning after the Ambassador's press conference announcing the package of measures designed to help Armenia achieve free and fair elections in 2007 and 2008, the President's office asked the Ambassador to meet with him privately on the next working day, October 31. At the meeting, which was attended also by Foreign Minister Oskanian, the President recapitulated complaints he has made previously (most recently during A/S Dan Fried's visit) about the current director of the National Democratic Institute in Yerevan, Chad Rogers, a Canadian citizen. The main burden of Kocharian's lengthy presentation was that Rogers was undermining the official U.S. policy of supporting the Constitutional amendments by advising Opposition politicians as to how they could most effectively counter the government's campaign to have those amendments adopted in the November 27 referendum. The text of the President's letter to the Secretary is at Para. 5.

3. (S) Background of the NDI Issue in Armenia. The Kocharian administration has periodically voiced complaints about the activities of NDI, which is partially funded by USAID, for several years running. Within the memory of officers now at post, Kocharian convoked the Charge on this issue in early 2004 and subsequently expressed misgivings during the visit of then-Deputy Secretary Armitage in April 2004 (reftel). Foreign Minister Oskanian complained publicly about NDI in a talk at CSIS in June 2004. For a time the issue lay dormant, except for being the subject of a study (the ARD study) commissioned by AID on the effectiveness of assistance to political parties that concluded that this assistance had not been particularly effective. It surfaced again, however, at the end of August, when Kocharian sent word through Oskanian that the U.S. policy of backing the Constitutional amendments was being undermined by Rogers's activities. At that time, the Ambassador invited Rogers to come in for a friendly chat about NDI's activities; he did not "lay down the law," but cautioned Rogers to be more careful in pursuing what he understood to be legitimate political-party training activities that were evenly distributed across the political spectrum. There have been rumors that Rogers, who is socially connected with many expatriates here in Yerevan, is -- or at least was at one time -- quite taken with the idea of bringing about a "pomegranate revolution" in Armenia along the lines of the "colored revolutions" in Georgia and Ukraine. President Kocharian has access to those rumors and much more, as the Armenian security apparatus has kept Rogers under close surveillance, judging from several remarks Kocharian has made to the Ambassador and USAID Director Phillips.

4. (S) Asked if there was anything "illegal" that Rogers had done, Kocharian demurred and said he preferred to say that his actions were "not useful," had a conspiratorial character involving late-night "secret" assignments, and could potentially, in his view, undermine the security of the state. The Ambassador made it clear once again that the U.S. position was not to foment revolution in the streets, but rather to support reform and evolutionary progress toward democracy; that was what the package of measures just announced (and previewed with Kocharian and other officials in September) was intended to do. President Kocharian was already aware that Mr. Rogers was scheduled to depart Armenia for a new assignment (in Kosovo) o/a November 7. Kocharian did not say he wanted NDI as an institution to quit Armenia. He also made clear that he had no complaint either about the package of proposed measures or about the U.S. Mission or U.S. policy as a whole.

15. (S) Begin text (original in English) of President Kocharian's letter to Secretary Rice:

October 26, 2005, Yerevan

Ms. Condoleezza Rice
Secretary of State

SIPDIS
United States of America

Dear Madam Secretary,

Thank you for your call of August 25. I very much appreciate your willingness to support the meetings between the Presidents of Armenia and Azerbaijan and to contribute towards the just resolution of the Nagorno Karabagh conflict.

I also noted the great importance you attach to the Constitutional Reform in Armenia. You mentioned that the reform is a step forward in furthering democracy, rule of law and human rights. The amendments have now been adopted by the National Assembly and the referendum is scheduled for November 27.

The successful drafting of the amendments would have been impossible without solid support by the Council of Europe, the OSCE, the European Union and, of course, the United States of America. Your Embassy in Yerevan has also been very supportive and committed to the implementation of the Constitutional amendments, as well as to the reforms in Armenia in general. It is therefore a great irony that at least some of US assistance is being used contrary to the well-established policy of your Government of supporting the amendments to the Constitution.

Particularly, Yerevan office of the National Democratic Institute, at least partially funded by USAID, continues its misbalanced support for those political parties in Armenia which spare no effort to fail the constitutional reform (sic). Moreover, it provokes those groups to step up their actions aimed against the referendum. All of the leading recipients of NDI training and support in Armenia are among the staunchest opponents of the Constitutional reform.

While we fully realize that NDI is a non-governmental institution, we would appreciate assuring a better oversight over the application of public funds granted by the United States for advancement of democratic values in Armenia.

Cordially,
/s/
Robert Kocharyan
End text.

16. (S) COMMENT: Post sees a connection between President Kocharian's desire to register his dissatisfaction with the activities of NDI at this time and the failure of the November 27 referendum on constitutional amendments that he quite reasonably must fear. If he were simply annoyed by the activities of Rogers, who is leaving next week, there would be no reason to complain about him officially at this late date. Probably the reason Kocharian wanted to bring the matter to the attention of the Secretary at this time was to establish ahead of time a reasonable explanation for the possible failure of the amendments package at the November 27 poll. Kocharian may want to set NDI up for blame, and may plan to charge his opponents with having accepted foreign advice and assistance. It could also be that, assuming the referendum fails, he may wish either to criticize or to gain leverage on our enhanced program of democracy-building assistance. Kocharian is well aware that further slippage on the MCC "ruling justly" indicators could cost Armenia the Millennium Challenge compact currently being negotiated. Kocharian has previously said that, even if the referendum goes off with zero falsification of results, the opposition will cry foul and attempt to bring demonstrators into the streets. This is, in fact, what some of the more extreme opposition politicians are planning. END COMMENT

17. (S) RECOMMENDATION: Given the real prospect that Armenia could make a major stride toward genuine democracy at the time of the 2007 (legislative) and 2008 (presidential) elections, now is not the time for NDI (or any of our democracy programs) to wrap up their operations here. In fact, it was the prospect of the next general elections that persuaded Mission management not to act on the implicit recommendation of the ARD study and phase out technical assistance to political parties here. What is needed at this point is 1) a new director of NDI who can project an image that is more in line with the evolution-not-revolution position adopted by the U.S. Government with regard to Armenia; 2) better coordination of NDI and other U.S.-sponsored efforts on the ground; and 3) the addition of an IRI representative to give our push for free and fair elections a bipartisan look.

18. (S) As for President Kocharian's letter to the Secretary, the original of which will be pouched to EUR/CACEN, post recommends that there be no written response.
EVANS